

# CHANGING PATTERNS OF UTILIZATION OF CENSUS DATA IN NEPAL

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*T. S. Bastola,*

*R. K. Gharty Chhetry,*

*Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal.*

## **1 Background**

Nepal is a landlocked country located along the Himalayas bordered by India and China. It has an area of 147,181 square kilometers. It is rectangular in shape with an average length of 885 kilometers from east to west and an average breadth of 193 kilometers from north to south. The country is non-uniform from north to south in terms of terrain.

Geographically the country is divided into three belts of Mountains, Hills and Terai the plains. For administrative purposes, it is divided into 75 districts which are grouped into five development regions. Within each district there are village development committees in rural areas and municipalities in urban areas. In total there are 3,905 village development committees and 58 municipalities all over the country. The lowest administrative unit of the country is a ward. There are altogether 36 thousand wards.

## **2 The 2001 Population Census of Nepal**

Population censuses in Nepal have been conducted almost at an interval of 10 years. The first census of Nepal was barely a head count and this was conducted in 1911. The last census was conducted in 2001. The 11<sup>th</sup> population census of the country is scheduled due in the year 2011.

Two types of questionnaires were administered in the 2001 census: “Short” form for complete enumeration (for all households in the country) and a more detailed “Long” form used for a sample of about 20 percent of households. Systematic sampling was followed by taking a “one in eight” housing units in each enumeration area. However, complete enumeration was done in 6 districts and in 52 municipalities. Both the questionnaires collected information at household as well as at individual level.

The 2001 population census collected information of all people of the country on their usual place of residence. It, however, excluded temporary visitors, tourists, resident foreign diplomats and refugees. The number of households enumerated in the 2001 census was 4.25 million and the population count was 23.15 million. Disturbances due to the political insurgency at the time of enumeration affected the census count in some areas.

### **3 Utilization and Analysis of Census Data in Nepal**

Population census is the single most important source of data on different aspects of population. It provides a data set on the population at all levels of a country's administrative units. The census data are of immense help in formulating development plans and policies and for implementing developmental activities in the country. In Nepal, the 2001 census data have been extensively utilized for several purposes. The Tenth Plan (2002 - 2007) and the Interim Plan (2008-2010), for example, were based on the basic information provided by the 2001 census.

Reliable information is a basic starting point to address the emerging issues of social exclusion in the country. In the absence of a separate "anthropological/linguistic" survey, population census has remained the single most important reliable source of information on caste/ethnicity and their various socio-economic characteristics. The 2001 census is the latest key data source of different communities of Nepal.

#### **3.1 Utilization of the 2001 Census Data**

Some of the major areas where the 2001 census data have been utilized in Nepal are highlighted in the following.

- a. **Poverty Mapping:** The 2001 census data combined with the "Nepal Living Standards Survey" data of 2003/04 produced a report on "Small Area Estimation of Poverty, Caloric Intake and Malnutrition in Nepal" in 2006.
- b. **Sampling Frames:** The 2001 census provided a frame for other surveys and census. The National Sample Census of Agriculture, 2001/02; Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2003/04, Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, 2006 and Nepal Labour Force Survey, 2007 are some of the major surveys that utilized the frame from the last population census.
- c. **Inclusion Issues:** The Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007 has specifically mentioned the principle of inclusiveness for determining the number of members to the Constitution Assembly. In the absence of a separate anthropological and linguistic survey in the country, the 2001 population census data on caste/ethnic and language groups were utilized for this purpose.

- d. Apportionments: According to the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007, the allocation of members in the Constitution Assembly was determined based on ratio of the district population. This provision in the Interim constitution of Nepal has tremendously increased the importance as well as the utility of the 2001 census data.
- e. Population Monographs and other Analyses: After the publication of 2001 census results, a detailed analysis of the data was done and presented in the “Population Monograph of Nepal, 2003”. Various scholars from different fields contributed in preparing the Monograph. These analyses very much helped in exploring the socio-economic and demographic situation of the country and are very popular among the university students and researchers.
- f. Gender Analyses: A separate set of publications pertaining to the gender analysis based on the census data was prepared. “Population Census Results in Gender Perspective, 2002” published in three volumes included tables and analyses in six different socio-economic and demographic areas focusing the gender issues.
- g. Population Projections: For the inter-census period, population estimates are obtained from the population projections which become helpful for the planners and researchers. After the 2001 census, “Population Projections for 2002 – 2021, Nepal” was prepared based on the 2001 census. These projections provided national, regional, rural/urban and district level estimates under three scenario (slow, medium and fast) decline of fertility.
- h. Socio-economic Atlas of the country: A “Population and Socio-economic Atlas of Nepal” was prepared and published in 2004. The Atlas used the thematic census data of 2001 and the spatial digital topographic database created by the Survey Department in 2001.
- i. Nepal Info: Another important use of 2001 census data has been in the preparation of “NepalInfo”, a statistical data set. Based on the “DevInfo Package” it gives the MDG indicators from the census data and other administrative records. This package is very useful for monitoring the MDG indicators in Nepal. Moreover, the beauty of Nepal Info is that it has user friendly facilities to produce charts, graphs and maps.

#### **4 Utilization of the 2011 Census Data**

As the population census is a decennial activity in Nepal, much change should not be expected from census to census. The basic idea is to get the fresh count of the population and interlink it with other regular social, economic and demographic variables. Much divergence from census to census could lead to the problem of comparability at the national as well as international level. However, as the country is

heading towards the federal structures there will certainly be impacts on the upcoming census. So, some of the probable fields where this census will be focused and its data are utilized are discussed below. In the course of time, more attention will be given to make it the best census and use its data efficiently.

#### **4.1 Census Tabulations and Analysis for New Nepal**

The population census is the largest statistical operation which is very expensive too. The key strength of census is the ability to provide data for small geographic areas and for small population groups. Nevertheless, the population census should produce statistics that are relevant to data users. Every action in census should be directed towards producing the relevant output that meets the needs of data users.

In the context of building a New Nepal, the upcoming population census of 2011 will have significant role in restructuring and modernization of the nation. Most important is the result of the new census will be helpful in allocating the resources to federal states. So, there are opportunities as well as challenges in conducting the 2011 census. Besides, this census will mark one hundred years of census counting in the country.

#### **4.2 Disaggregated Tabulations and Presentations of the Census Results**

The importance of census data up to the smallest administrative area is very important and it can't be undermined. So, coordination and cooperation of all the government agencies is indispensable in analyzing huge census data at the national, district and VDC levels. It is the responsibility of the Bureau in presenting and publishing the sex disaggregated population data with other salient characteristics up to the smallest unit (i.e., a ward). For this, coordination among several government agencies is crucial.

At present the census data are presented in NepalInfo which is an updated version of the DevInfo. NepalInfo contains data related to the Millennium Development Goals indicators and gender indicators. It has become very popular among users and researchers in various fields. The beauty of this package is that the users can make maps and present them according to their own needs with ease. The 2011 census data will also be presented in the Nepal Info after the census.

#### **4.3 Special Analysis of the Census Results**

The analytical reports of the 2011 census should be done in a special manner. In the past the census analysis was done in the form of Population Monographs having contributions by eminent persons in the related fields. In this way the 2001 census results were analyzed and produced in two volumes of Population Monographs containing various analyses in different topics pertaining to demographic, social and economic aspects related to the population of the country.

Now this type of analysis will be replaced by several volumes with specific issues and themes. This will benefit the users for their specialized fields.

Moreover sample micro data will also be provided to the users so as to analyze and work on their own. This will help the users and researchers to play with the data and understand and also easily produce tables and maps according to their needs.

#### **4.4 Gender and Social Inclusion**

There has been a lot of progress while engendering the 2001 census and it has also helped in addressing several issues of inclusion as well. This is an ongoing process which should be taken into account with care in the course of time. The census 2011 should also address the social inclusion and gender issues as well in a more critical manner. Undoubtedly, the upcoming census may face new challenges regarding social inclusion issues. These issues can be addressed with the support and coordination of the various government and non-government organizations as well as international agencies.

The upcoming population census of Nepal should focus the valid requirements of the users and articulate their needs as well. So, this again is a good opportunity for the Bureau to address the pertinent issues of gender and social inclusion through the census. To achieve this, the system needs to involve in creating awareness on usefulness of up to date statistics and its timeliness. So, collaborative and inclusive approach is deemed necessary to acquire supports from as many partners as possible.

The upcoming census of 2011 is going to be conducted during the political transitional phase of the country. In this context, the stakeholders, political parties and social groups have been expecting fresh social and economic information in detail from the census. So, CBS is definitely going to face challenges of meeting enormous demand for information on the one hand and on the other, maintain quality at disaggregated level as well.

#### **4.5 Demographic and Socio-Economic Projections**

In Nepal, the vital registration system is at infancy stage and only reliable source of information on population change and its socio-economic characteristics is the decennial population census. In order to fulfill the demand of statistics from the census during the intercensal period it is very essential to have a complete set of demographic and socio-economic projections of the country. So, again this is a big challenge for the Bureau for coping the varying demands of the users and researchers of all sectors in the national as well as international field. Again such type of projections should be done at all levels at the national, regional, geographical and for various administrative levels down up to the wards.

#### **4.6 Atlas for New Nepal**

In the realm of the state of the art technology in data presentation, interpretation and dissemination, GIS is becoming popular these days. It is no doubt a very useful tool for data presentation and dissemination. As an ongoing activity, the New Nepal also foresees to look into the GIS aspects on the 2011 census. In this context, a new Atlas should be prepared based on the 2011 census data and using GIS technology. This will help the presentation of census data to be more useful in the changed context of New Nepal.

### **5 Conclusion**

Population censuses conducted decennially carries a huge significance for gathering a massive wealth of information. It not only gives the current state of the population but also opens avenues to all the users and researchers. The 2011 population census data of Nepal is a new challenge in the changed context of the country's political scenario. This census would determine the federal structure of the country as well. This has given the country a very thought provoking and brainstorming job from the very planning stage of the census. This pertains to several meeting with stakeholders and users groups so as to get concrete suggestions for the better utilization of the census results.

After the census the data will be utilized in various fields of socio-economic sectors. A new set of benchmark data for different purposes will be established. It has already been very essential for the country to provide data for small administrative areas which will ultimately help the country for all its new plan and program monitoring. In the days to come, the federal budget of the country will be allocated on the basis of the data obtained from the fresh census of 2011 giving a new direction for the new millennium.

The future surveys will be based on the frames prepared from this census. Gender and social inclusion will be addressed in the upcoming census to update the sex disaggregated data on different topics. In addition to women, children, the aged and the disabled the census will also provide data on special groups of people in the society who are disadvantaged and marginalized. Information on different caste and ethnic groups in the country will be collected and their status in the society will be reflected. This will tremendously help the government and civil society to plan the dire needs of the people in different areas including those in the remote rural areas of the country.

Above and all, the census data will be an asset for a decade and will be extensively used by different groups of people for advocacy as well as for planning and monitoring purposes.